

Fights to prevent sexual assault in the military, expansion of small business opportunities

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (CA-47) today voted to further support our military families and strengthen counterterrorism efforts by supporting the National Defense Authorization Act of 2011. The bill gives our troops a well-deserved pay raise, expands TRICARE coverage and repeals the controversial Don't Ask Don't Tell provision. Sanchez is the highest ranking woman on the House Armed Services Committee and chairs the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats, and Capabilities.

"I am proud to support the National Defense Authorization Act of 2011," said Sanchez. "This bill continues to expand support for troops by giving them a pay raise along with more pay for those who serve in imminent danger. It expands TRICARE health coverage to include adult dependent children up to the of age twenty-six, and removes the controversial and long-outdated Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, allowing capable service members to serve in the military regardless of their sexual orientation.

"This bill also provides additional resources for our military spouses and service members who are students by establishing a pilot program that allows them to take, identify and obtain desirable and portable careers, as well as expanding college loan repayment benefits."

As Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats, and Capabilities, Sanchez was able to address the growing rise of extremism in the United States and abroad by including \$26.5 million to fund counter-ideology initiatives. Reiterating Congress' commitment to the U.S. Special Operations Command, the bill fully funds their budget request. The bill also authorizes \$2.6 billion for Homeland Defense and counter-proliferation activities to ensure the security and safety of the American people. Finally, this bill establishes a Rapid Innovation Program to help the Defense Department quickly transition innovative, life-saving equipment from small businesses and other innovative firms into the hands of our men and women in combat.

The passage of the 2011 National Defense Authorization also provides our service members with assurance that the Department of Defense will take concrete initiative to help prevent sexual assault in the military. The bill includes the most comprehensive legislative package to

ever address sexual assault in the military which includes provisions Congresswoman Sanchez strongly advocated for.

During debate on the bill, Sanchez also fought for the expansion of small business opportunities in the Department of Defense. Sanchez urged the House Committee on Small Businesses to work with the House Armed Services Committee to rapidly provide resources to our small businesses which are the backbone of this country.

“While my support for the National Defense Authorization Act was unwavering because of the strong support it gives our troops and our military families I was extremely disappointed that I was unable to include several small business provisions that would have not only saved the Defense Department money but would have strengthened small businesses and created jobs. As someone who represents a large number of small businesses in Orange County, I am committed to doing all I can to help our small businesses grow and thrive, especially during these tough economic times.

“My amendment would have repealed the Small Business Competitive Demonstration Program reinstating the use of small business set-asides for Federal procurements in certain industry groups, assuring that these small businesses are awarded a fair proportion of Defense Department contracts. Also, I wish we would have been able to extend the Small Business Innovation Research program by one year and apply that funding toward critical technical assistance that would have strengthened the ability of small businesses to meet Defense Department requirements.

“It would have made perfect sense to include a five year extension of the Defense Department’s Mentor-Protégé program, which would pair up major Defense Department contractors with small businesses in order to provide developmental assistance to small businesses and guide them to a point where they can sustain themselves.”